

JUNE 9, 1976

THE PRIMARIES AND THEIR IMPACT  
(REVISED VERSION)

ANNCR: THIS YEAR'S RECORD NUMBER OF THIRTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES REACHED A CLIMAX WITH TUESDAY'S PARTY ELECTIONS IN NEW JERSEY, OHIO AND CALIFORNIA. CHARLES HEDD LOOKS AT THE PRIMARY SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT ON 1976 POLITICS.

VOICE: (OPT) THE LONG, WINDING TRAIL THAT BEGAN EARLY THIS YEAR IN SNOW-COVERED NEW HAMPSHIRE HAS FINALLY ENDED ON THE SUNNY SHORES OF CALIFORNIA. ALONG THE WAY, VOTERS IN WELL OVER HALF THE STATES, INCLUDING ALL THE HEAVILY-POPULATED ONES, WERE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO INFLUENCE THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CHOICES FOR 1976, A DECISION ONCE RESERVED FOR PARTY PROFESSIONALS. (END OPT)

THE PURPOSE OF PRIMARY ELECTIONS IS TO TEST THE POPULARITY AND THE ENDURANCE OF THE VARIOUS CANDIDATES AND, IN THE PROCESS, TO ELECT DELEGATES TO THE NATIONAL PARTY CONVENTIONS WHERE THE NOMINATIONS TAKE PLACE. THE SYSTEM IS WIDELY CRITICIZED FOR TAKING TOO MUCH TIME AND MONEY AND FOR ITS OFTEN INCONCLUSIVE RESULTS. BUT EVEN THE CRITICS ADMIT THE PRIMARIES OPEN UP THE NOMINATING PROCESS TO A BROAD RANGE OF CANDIDATES WHO MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE QUALIFY, AS THE EVENTS OF THIS YEAR HAVE SO CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED.

DEMOCRAT JIMMY CARTER, WHO FIVE MONTHS AGO WAS HARDLY ANYONE'S FAVORITE OUTSIDE HIS HOME STATE OF GEORGIA, WAS THE PRINCIPAL BENEFICIARY. RUNNING IN ALL THE PRIMARIES, JIMMY CARTER QUICKLY PROVED HE WAS A SOUTHERNER WITH NORTHERN APPEAL WHO WOULD QUICKLY OUTDISTANCE ALL OF HIS BETTER-KNOWN RIVALS. WITHOUT THE PRIMARY SYSTEM, THE DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP WOULD HAVE ALMOST CERTAINLY TURNED TO SOMEONE ELSE. BUT BECAUSE OF

CARTER'S SUCCESS IN THE PRIORITIES, CLIMAXED BY HIS STRONG FINISH IN TUESDAY'S PRIMARY ELECTIONS, PARTY LEADERS, INCLUDING SOME ONE-TIME RIVALS, ARE NOW RUSHING TO JOIN WHAT HAS BECOME THE CARTER BANDWAGON.

AS FOR THE REPUBLICAN SIDE, PRESIDENT FORD ENTERED THE CAMPAIGN WITH THE ENORMOUS INFLUENCE OF HIS OFFICE AND THE OVERWHELMING BACKING OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. BUT IN A SURPRISINGLY CLOSE TWO-MAN CONTEST, CONSERVATIVE RONALD REAGAN IS CHALLENGING THE CENTURY-OLD TRADITION AGAINST THE UNSEATING OF AN INCUMBENT PRESIDENT BY HIS OWN PARTY.

FROM THIS POINT ON, IT'S A MATTER OF ARITHMETIC, AND THE NUMBERS SUGGEST THAT JIMMY CARTER MAY HAVE WITHIN A WEEK'S TIME THE MAJORITY OF THE DELEGATES NEEDED FOR THE DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION. FOR THE REPUBLICANS, THE NUMBERS ARE NOT NEARLY AS DECISIVE. AS A RESULT, BOTH PRESIDENT FORD AND RONALD REAGAN WILL SPEND THE NEXT FEW WEEKS TRYING TO WIN THE SUPPORT OF THOSE DELEGATES STILL UNCOMMITTED OR THOSE STILL TO BE CHOSEN AT STATE PARTY CONVENTIONS.

IN SHORT, THE PRIMARY SYSTEM HAS OPENED UP THE PARTY NOMINATING PROCESS, GIVING THE DEMOCRATS WHAT LOOKS LIKE A SURPRISE WINNER AND THE REPUBLICANS A CONTEST THAT AT THIS STAGE IS TOO CLOSE TO CALL.